

MRHA

Missouri Rural Health Association

November 10, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary of Agriculture
Farm Bill
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3355

Dear Secretary Johanns:

This is in regard to the request for comment on the 2007 Farm Bill. I am writing on behalf of the Missouri Rural Health Association, a statewide organization composed of a large number of representatives from the health, social services, and behavioral health fields.


The request for public comment raises the question of whether more government attention should be focused on investing in the infrastructure in rural America by investing in new technologies. It is to this topic we draw your attention.

As you know, President Bush has forwarded a bold agenda for implementing a health information technology infrastructure throughout the country in the next few years. Rural and very remote communities do not have access to low-cost broadband services that can help them to compete in today's economic markets. There are insufficient resources to support all those communities that need support to purchase broadband access. Rural Utilities Services (RUS) funding has been an important resource, but it is insufficient to meet the country's needs.

We recommend that the 2007 Farm bill be modified to include capacity to support the expansion of rural resources to support broadband access. High speed connectivity is critical not only for conducting business in the 21st century, but for expanding access to health care in rural hospitals, clinics, and private health practitioner offices. If the health information technology initiative is to succeed, and if small businesses and rural health services are to have equal access to the benefits of HITECH (e.g., electronic health records for employees, patients, medical staffs), then broadband services must be expanded throughout the nation.

We believe the 2007 Farm bill is critical to achieving this goal, and seek your support for the investment.

Sincerely,


Michael W. Prewitt, Ph.D.
President, MRHA

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